

# FOOD SECURITY IN THE ABSENCE OF A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FAIRNESS WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL TRADING SYSTEM

Nadia Julianna Bucciarelli <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Political Studies, Queen's University, Canada

<sup>a</sup> Corresponding author: [nadia.bucciarelli@queensu.ca](mailto:nadia.bucciarelli@queensu.ca)

© Ontario International Development Agency. ISSN 1923-6654 (print)  
ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the discriminatory practices of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the implications for food security in developing countries of the global South. It examines the power relations between the North and the South, as well as implications that the structures of the international trade system have in reinforcing certain ideas of the relationship between developed and developing countries. Particular attention will be given to the agriculture sector, and the implications of neoliberal theory and practice on the food security of low-income countries. Food security is often undermined by the current structures of the international trading regime, and remains a highly contentious area of debate within the current round of trade negotiations.

**Keywords:** Agricultural development, food security, sub-Saharan Africa, the World Trade Organization

## I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the global trading system has created a wealth of opportunity promoting prosperity and growth. Aided by globalization, the world trade system has helped to foster a greater connectedness among nations and peoples. Though the resulting interdependence created by such connectedness has enhanced solidarity, a troubling collateral effect has also created greater disparity among the world's bottom billion. Consequently many developing and under developed countries have seen an increase in national poverty demographics, this, even despite the adoption of neoliberal policies championed by the affluent north. The precarious situation with which many of the world's poor are faced raises many questions about the normative framework that guides the global trading regime, which thus far has allowed for disparities to occur and continue. The pervasiveness of neoliberalism in shaping an understanding of trade

and development, fails to address the deep rooted and structural inefficiencies of the international political system, and therefore prescribes solutions that exacerbate the underlying challenges rather than achieving sustainable solutions. Consequential of this understanding, divergences between the global north and the global south are reinforced. Particularly in the case of agricultural trade, neoliberal policy prescriptions have left, in many instances, developing and least developed countries in a more unstable situation, subsequently propagating an endless struggle to escape the inherent poverty trap.

The constructivist approach can help to illuminate the consequences of certain ideas and conceptions of power relations, and its correlation to the practices of the international political system. This approach critically examines the role that social constructs play in reinforcing the status quo, but conversely the potential ability within the structure to allow for social change. The distribution of ideas, shaped by the identities and interests of states has important implications for theorizing about international politics.<sup>1</sup> A constructivist theoretical perspective delineates the effects of power and interests embedded in the unreflective actions of state actors within the international system on the formation of a collective self-consciousness within the sphere of international trade governance. This perspective will therefore provide insights into the pervasiveness of neoliberal economic theory within the international trading regime and the consequential effects it exhibits on the food security of developing and least developed countries.

The following study examines the constructivist theoretical approach in further detail, highlighting the

---

<sup>1</sup>Alexandre Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 371

way in which this framework is useful in understanding the interests and ideas of state actors, institutions and social processes. Furthermore, the study examines the power relations between the North and the South, as well as implications that the structures of the international trade system have in reinforcing certain ideas of the relationship between developed and developing countries. Particular attention will be given to the agriculture sector, and more specifically the implications of neoliberal economic theory on the food security of low-income countries. Food security perceived as an essential democratic right is often undermined by the current structures of the international trading regime. Agriculture remains an essential sector for many developing and least developed countries. Yet, food security and the livelihood of citizen remain highly vulnerable to the social processes of international trade. The issue of agriculture remains highly contentious, as many developed countries continue to uphold protectionist policies while promoting liberalization of the sector within developing countries. The ideas embedded within the system therefore determined by the identities and the interest of the OECD countries, which shapes and influence the social structures and process of international trade.

## II. THE RELENTLESS STRUGGLE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Within the multilateral trading system there exist significant disparities among trading partners between developed, developing and least developed countries. Under the existing rules of trade, many developing and least developed countries (LDCs) are at a great disadvantage and often are unable to profit from the benefits of trade. Roughly half of the world's population lives below the global poverty line, living on an average of two dollars a day, while the bottom billion lives on less than a dollar a day.<sup>2</sup> What makes this situation of inequality more stark is the reality that a significant portion of individuals living in high income economies average, per capita, an income of seventy-five dollars a day.<sup>3</sup> Extreme poverty within the world's poorest regions has become a pressing global issue. The United Nations with the support of its member countries have vowed to support the Millennium Development Goals, which above all commits to the eradication of extreme poverty. There is widespread consensus of

<sup>2</sup> William R. Cline, *Trade Policy and Global Poverty*, (Washington: Institute for International Economics: Centre for Global Development, 2004), 14

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Nagel, "The Problem of Global Justice", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (2005), 118

the correlation between poverty, growth and trade, that in order to achieve reduction in global poverty sustained economic growth is necessary.<sup>4</sup> The economy in many developing and least developed countries is significantly rural based; agricultural trade remains a significant component of the countries' economic growth. External restrictions, including protectionist policies in industrial agricultural markets, and subsidies place great strain on developing countries that simply lack the resources to effectively compete. Conversely, reform of the current rules of trade under the World Trade Organization (WTO) and removal of domestic trade restrictions may not result in substantial changes necessary to alleviate low-income countries from their current situation. Many of the proposed reforms of the Doha Development Round continue to reinforce the prevalence of liberalization to achieve development and economic growth. A critical examination of the prevailing neoliberal rhetoric and the role that it has in defining structure and the social processes will provide a deeper understanding of relations between the members of the international trading system.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NEOLIBERALISM TO CONSTRUCTIVISM

The prevailing gap between the developed and developing world underscores inherent flaws within the international trading system. Under the World Trade Organization, membership is inescapable and the distribution of the benefits of trade is disproportionate, which leaves developing and least developed countries at a grave disadvantage.

The following section attempts to demonstrate how the pervasiveness of neoliberal understanding creates an impediment to the debate and restrains the solutions to fit within the mould of the dominant structures. It outlines the main tenants of the neoliberal approach and demonstrates that it is inherently flawed and fails to provide alternative ways of understanding international politics that addresses the systemic concerns of developing and least developed countries. The constructivist approach, premised on the role of ideas in social processes, will be highlighted through this analysis as a critical way of interpreting international politics. An understanding of the role of ideas in behaviour and structure will allow for a re-conceptualization of the main issues of the debate. The ensuing analysis will provide an examination of the constructivist approach that emphasizes the pattern of unreflective behaviour in international politics, notable within the sphere of international trade governance.

<sup>4</sup> Cline, 29

The World Trading Organization (WTO) and its predecessor General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT), has set as its foundation the principles which embody the main tenants of neoliberalism and thus dictating the relationship between its trading partners. The underlying assumption provides that open markets and free trade will generate greater prosperity and more efficient allocation of the benefits of trade. Central to economic policy focused on market deregulation is openness to trade achieved through trade liberalization. The proponents of trade liberalization highlight the widespread gains achieved with the reduction of trade barriers. An acceptance of the virtues of trade liberalization policy should be made with great caution. Many of the benefits of liberalization remain asymmetrically distributed in favour of the major players of the trading regime. The dominant theoretical approaches of international relations have been complacent in questioning the distribution of the benefits of trade and the interests to which these social processes are to be served.

Neoliberal institutionalism which emphasizes the role of international regimes in enabling states to realize their common interests represents one of the more dominant theoretical perspectives in international trade policy. Through a game theory approach, neoliberals are able to discern the reasons for which states cooperate, and thus a central focus of analysis is the institutions that lend the possibility of cooperative and lucrative arrangements. Accordingly, institutions reduce uncertainty within the international system, through the observation and consideration of the behaviour of state actors. Robert Keohane's theory of neoliberal institutionalism provides an interpretation of international regime formation based on the assumption that state behaviour is influenced by rational choice considerations. Keohane applies a rudimentary supply and demand analysis to determine the desire for regimes. He suggests that institutions allow state actors to realize their interests collectively while reducing transaction costs and uncertainty within the international system.<sup>5</sup> Stephen Haggard and Beth Simmons, in *Theories of International Regimes*, emphasize the impact that expanding interdependence among states has had on world politics. Accordingly, many state and non-state actors have developed "regime interests" as a result of the blurring of boundaries between international and national levels.<sup>6</sup> Neoliberalism as a theory of international relations emphasizes the interdependence between state and non-state actors.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Keohane, "The Demand for International Regimes", *International Organization* (1982), 326

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Haggard and Beth Simmons, "Theories of International Regimes", *International Organization* (1987), 515

A central focus of many neoliberalism scholars is the implication of economics and the ramifications for these relations. International regimes therefore provide regulations to try to influence state behaviour and consequentially shape the subsequent norms and social processes. Neoliberalist approaches are often focused on the power distribution among states, and often have difficulty accounting for any changes within the system. However, the common focus on interests emphasized attributes little attention to ideational factors which problematize any notion of fairness or justice within the discourse of international trade discourse.<sup>7</sup>

The underlying assumptions shared by both neorealism and neoliberalism based on a materialist and individualist ontology has been criticised for the problematic conclusion that it makes about international politics. Alexander Wendt, in the *Social Theory of International Politics*, strongly asserts that many scholars of international relations have focused on material forces, characterized as power and interest. Wendt alleges that many "bring in ideas only to mop up residual unexplained variance."<sup>8</sup> In contrast to primacy given to material forces of the neorealist and neoliberalist approaches, Wendt advocates an idealist or social ontology that emphasizes the role of ideas in understanding power and interest.<sup>9</sup> A consideration of the international structure through a constructivist theoretical perspective that understands the international structure as ideational rather than material, will provide insights into international politics which both neorealist and neoliberalist accounts fail to explain.

The constructivist theoretical perspective gives primacy to role of ideas in informing the identities and interests of state actors. A constructivist approach challenges the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in shaping the behaviour of states and the international system. There are three chief characteristics of constructivism which serves as the foundation for its ontological commitment. First, constructivism makes the epistemological claim that meaning is socially constructed and is intersubjective. Second, it advances the ontological claim that the social world is constructed. Finally, the constructivist theoretical approach is defined by emphasizing the reflexive relationship between social construction of knowledge and the construction of social reality.<sup>10</sup> Constructivism contends that the many determinants

<sup>7</sup> Americo Bevilacqua Zampetti, *Fairness in the World Economy: US Perspectives on International Trade Relations*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006), 12

<sup>8</sup> Wendt (1999), 371

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 371

<sup>10</sup> Stefano Guzzini, "The Concept of Power: a Constructivist Analysis", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (2005), 498-499

of international politics are socially constructed, formed by ensuing social processes. Similar to neoliberalism, constructivism examines the role of identities and interest, however, rather than providing an account attributed to material forces, constructivists observe identities and interest as a result of ideas that are constructed through social interactions.<sup>11</sup> Wendt advocates the primacy of identities and interests in constructing the social process of international politics, which he suggests are established by a collective meaning continually in process. It is contended by Sheldon Stryker that “the social process is one of constructing and reconstructing self and social relationships.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, drawing from this understanding of social process, changing processes will affect the “intersubjective knowledge” which the system is based upon.<sup>13</sup> This comprehension of social processes provides a heightened awareness of the practices of the international trading system.

Reconceptualising the structure of the international system in idealist terms through a constructivist theoretical approach provides a foundation for a more critical inquiry into the dominant norms and practices that define the social processes within the system. According to Wendt inquiry of the interaction of states, and the conceptions of self and other “might lead to progress in the system’s evolution.”<sup>14</sup> A constructivist approach therefore will provide for a deeper analysis into the distribution of ideas and how these ideas make up the structure of the international system. By understanding how these ideas shape social processes and its role in sustaining certain practises will provide for better understanding of the possibility of change within the international trading system.

#### IV. THE INTERNATIONAL TRADING REGIME

Constructivists esteem that ideas condition the behaviour of state actors and create a particular conception of ‘self’ and ‘other’ which drives them to pursue certain outcomes.<sup>15</sup> It is imperative to determine the social norms, ideas, and structural preconditions which influence behaviour and practices. The constructivist theoretical perspective can provide insights in understanding the norms and

ideas that shape the social processes within the political world. The international trading regime, since the establishment of the GATT in 1947, has embodied the idea of free trade and open markets as necessary to achieve prosperity and economic growth. Liberalization of markets toward a freer trading regime dictated the various rounds of GATT trade negotiations. However the relationship of liberal trade policies with development and economic growth has largely been challenged in the most recent trade round as many developing countries have been alienated under the current system.

The GATT negotiations established a reciprocal basis for the reduction of tariffs on industrial and manufactured goods and though agricultural products were largely excluded from the terms, these negotiations nonetheless were premised on reciprocity. It should be noted that liberalization of agricultural goods has been very limited in OCED countries, particularly in the United States and the European Union were protectionist policies remain robust. The norm of reciprocity however is still a fundamental concept that defines the social processes of the international trading regime. Consequentially, any state which fails to maintain this obligation is perceived as having an unfair advantage.<sup>16</sup> The perception of reciprocity as a fundamental norm that guides behaviour within the international trading system and an automatic correlation with fairness ignores the inherent disparities between the actors participating. The idea of fairness equated with reciprocity underlines the basic conception of neoliberal economic theory. Furthermore, the principle of fairness obligates members involved in arrangements of social cooperation to contribute a “fair share” and not to complacently accept the benefits burdened by other members.<sup>17</sup>

An examination through the constructivist perspective draws attention to the construction of interests by ideas. Wendt argues that ideas constitute interests, and consequently power is established primarily through the dispersion of interest.<sup>18</sup> There is widespread consensus among developing countries that the multilateral trading system is becoming less favourable and less relevant to their development concerns. Specifically criticism is directed towards the preservation of trade barriers under the current system which the removal of these barriers could stimulate pro-poor growth in low income countries.<sup>19</sup> Reports by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

<sup>11</sup> Wendt (1999), 371

<sup>12</sup> Sheldon Stryker, “The Vitalization of Symbolic Interactionism,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50 (March 1987), 93, quoted in Alexandre Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, *International Organization* (1992), 407

<sup>13</sup> Wendt (1992), 407

<sup>14</sup> Wendt (1999), 376

<sup>15</sup> Zampetti (2006), 15

<sup>16</sup> Zampetti (2006), 26

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>18</sup> Wendt (1999), 122

<sup>19</sup> Ademola Oyejide, Development Dimensions in Multilateral Trade Negotiations”, in Mike Moore *World Trade Organization: Doha and Beyond*, (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2004), 68

and the World Bank emphasize the negative effect subsidies have on the development. Both reports have expressed concern agricultural subsidies in developed countries which have undermined the agricultural economy in developing countries and their exports by depressing world prices and limiting incomes which developing countries can be expected to gain from international trade.<sup>20</sup> The effect the current trading system has on the incomes of populations in developing countries is significant and demonstrates the disproportionate and unfair distribution of the benefits of trade. Developing countries remain in a precarious situation with their standard of living suppressed. Far more complex has been the debate over the gains of opening industrial markets for developing country exports or developing countries opening up their own markets. Although there has been significant pressure on developing countries to liberalize their trade, it remains unclear whether reduction of trade barriers would ensure more fair competition. There has been much debate questioning the relationship between the policy of trade liberalization and growth. Many developing countries lack the infrastructure and the capabilities to reduce barriers while promoting development. Conversely liberal trade policy remains significant in developing policy within developing countries, yet long term benefits may not be substantial if it is not combined with foreign market opportunities.<sup>21</sup> There remains disparity in the distribution of benefits within the international trading system despite efforts by its members to create more fair terms of trade. The social processes of the trading system therefore continue to benefit the interests of the affluent countries of the developed north. Observed from a constructivist perspective would therefore suggest that the structures of the regime represent the interests of status quo states that have no interest in changing the rules of the international system.<sup>22</sup> The prevalence of protectionist policies demonstrates the desire of status quo states in maintaining the benefits that are gained from the current arrangements.

The use of protection policies in the agricultural sector among industrial countries has had significant consequences for developing countries since most are predominately agriculturally-driven economies. Subsidies and tariffs have made entry into markets difficult for many low-income countries, many which simply lack the resources to compete. It should be noted however that protection policies have been used in both developed and developing countries, which have both had consequences on trading. William Cline, in *Trade Policy and Global Poverty* has noted that many low-income countries which

have enacted their own agricultural protection policies, have experienced greater welfare losses than from those imposed by developed countries.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the protections which developed countries impose are far greater, and the impact of the reductions of these subsidies would have significant benefits for developing countries.<sup>24</sup> The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy is a notable example, one worth considering in further detail, and of Particular interest are its distorting effects on international agricultural. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) embodies protectionist measures that have had a detrimental impact on market access of small farming cooperatives in low-income countries, and thus has had an impact on the food security of many developing and least developed countries. John Madeley's provocative book, *Hungry for Trade* notes that the export subsidies embodied in CAP has functioned to stabilize food prices in the European Union (EU) while transferring these costs onto the world market. The fluctuation in price for agricultural goods that result has created greater insecurity and barriers to the conditions faced by developing countries.<sup>25</sup> The case of CAP highlights the central role which identities and interests of powerful states have within international politics. A constructivist perspective provides an assessment of the relationship between the practices of the international trading system and the cognitive structures of state actors and the system of states.<sup>26</sup> An assessment of the principles established under the Agreement on Agriculture highlight the dominant role of the interests of the developed countries and their influence on the prevalence of these structures which dismiss the fundamental concerns of developing countries.

The Agreement on Agriculture of the WTO intended to readdress many of the perceived inequalities of the rules of the trading regime and ensure greater and more open access in the agriculture sector. The Agreement on Agriculture established in 1995, created three main pillars which set the terms for domestic support, market access and export subsidies, aimed at bringing about increasing liberalization. These objectives more specifically required reduction of tariffs by 15 per cent for developed countries, and 10 per cent for developing countries, restraint of indirect subsidies and reduction

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>21</sup> Oyejide (2004), 73

<sup>22</sup> Wendt (1999), 124

<sup>23</sup> William R. Cline, *Trade Policy and Global Poverty*, (Washington: Institute for International Economics: Centre for Global Development, 2004), 126

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 126

<sup>25</sup> John Madeley, *Hungry for Trade: How the Poor Pay for Free Trade*, (Halifax: Fenwood, 2006), 69

<sup>26</sup> Wendt (1992), 424

of export subsidies.<sup>27</sup> The effects of trade liberalization are expected to create higher food prices that have consequential effects on net food importing and exporting countries. This raises many concerns about the possible burden that the terms of the agreement will place on vulnerable low-income countries. Madeley pointedly remarks that the terms outlined in the Agreement on Agriculture have been exploited by developed countries because of its dubious language of the commitments.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, protectionist policies have perpetuated despite the reforms. The CAP, for example was reformed before the Agreement on Agriculture came into effect, consequentially the EU has claimed that it is not obliged to make any changes to its agricultural subsidies and related programs.<sup>29</sup> The existing rules of trade rather than ensuring greater and more open access to developed markets in the agricultural sector, reinforces the status quo and the predominance of the interests of the developed and affluent north. Subsidies and protectionist policies for the agricultural industry have restrained developing countries and hindered the development of fair and equal competition within the trading regime. Developing countries are at a significant disadvantage as a result of the current terms of trade which distribute benefits disproportionately and are further strained by the lack of fair background conditions of exchange.

The removal of agricultural protection has created heated debates within the international community and has been a major reason for deadlocks at many of the negotiating talks. Recent trade negotiations have acknowledged the inappropriateness of subsidies within the agricultural sector of industrial nations which restricts the entry of agricultural products from developing and least developed countries.<sup>30</sup> The Doha Development Round of multilateral trade negotiations attempted to address these issues and incorporate more inclusive policies sensitive to the development agenda of developing countries. The negotiations of the future of the global trading system became particularly concerned with the status of low-income countries within the WTO, which was

previously ignored.<sup>31</sup> The Doha Development Agenda initiated a third round of trade negotiations in response to disparities among developed and developing member states. Specifically the WTO set out to incorporate the needs and interests of low income countries within the Doha framework.<sup>32</sup> At the centre of the Doha agenda is poverty alleviation. Members of the international community have set out to address the major challenge and have established as a target reducing poverty by half of the current levels by 2015.<sup>33</sup> Liberalization of trade however remains a main avenue for achieving economic development in developing countries. Although trade liberalization alone cannot address the economic difficulties faced by developing countries, it remains the dominant conception premised on the ability to improve the benefits of trade with opening of markets. Primacy of neoliberal economic theory understood from a constructivist perspective, reinforces a particular understanding of the power-relations of state actors within the international system. The current terms outlined by the Agreement on Agriculture and the ongoing Doha trade round reinforces this status quo. The social processes of international trade can therefore be understood as the consequences of certain conceptions of power and interests of the dominant actors.<sup>34</sup> Without understanding the effects that the current structures have on the behaviour of states and the construction of their identities and interests, these trade agreements will continue to miss the fundamental issues that are at stake.

## V. ABSOLUTE FOOD INSECURITY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

The economies of many developing and least developed countries are rural-based and are dependent upon the agricultural sector. Consequentially, there are more fundamental concerns, such as food security and food sovereignty, in terms of agricultural trade. Madeley describes "food sovereignty" as nation-states having the "democratic right and power to determine production, distribution and consumption of food according to their preferences and cultural traditions."<sup>35</sup> This conception seems far from radical, yet there are many countries that are vulnerable to the erosion of their sovereignty. Arguably, the major players within the

<sup>27</sup> Samuel K. Gayi, "Does the WTO Agreement on Agriculture Endanger Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa?" , in Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, Shabd S. Acharya and Benjamin Davis, ed. *Food Security: Indicators, Measurement, and the Impact of Trade Openness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 287

<sup>28</sup> Madeley (2006), 69

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 69

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Nagel, "The Problem of Global Justice", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (2005), 143

<sup>31</sup> James Smith, "Inequality in International Trade? Developing Countries and Institutional Change in WTO Dispute Settlement", *Review of International Political Economy* (2004), 543

<sup>32</sup> Oyejide (2004), 69

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 69

<sup>34</sup> Wendt (1999), 135

<sup>35</sup> Madeley (2006), 30

international trading regime, the United States and the EU share the conception of food as a democratic right of nation-states. The protectionist policies that are characteristic of both the US and the EU agricultural industry are a starking example of the primacy that agriculture and food has within their respective political systems. Conversely, many developing and least developed countries are experiencing food insecurity, largely attributed to systemic poverty exacerbated by international trade. The populations in these regions experience food insecurity for two main reasons, first because of a lack of purchasing power to buy available food, and second, because many farmers are resource poor they are unable to acquire the technologies necessary to improve farming.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, trade liberalization has lead to an increase of food imports into low-income countries that have had negative consequences on small-scale farmers, while inhibiting the ability of these countries to achieve food security.<sup>37</sup> This, along with greater emphasis placed on production for international markets rather than domestic markets compounds the difficulties faced by developing countries in achieving food security.

Foreign debt and policies of the IMF and the World Bank have placed further restraints on the policies pursued by developing and least developed countries. Foreign debt has also had a considerable part in undermining the ability of developing and least developed countries to achieve food security and exacerbating the poverty within their region. Presence of foreign debt beginning in the 1990s has forced many countries to devote resources away from the agricultural sector in order to meet their repayment obligations.<sup>38</sup> Structural adjustment programs premised on trade liberalization has also functioned to divert resources away from the industry. Structural adjustment programmes insisted upon low-income countries by the IMF and the World Bank mandates countries to liberalize trade, reduce social spending and remove food subsidies.<sup>39</sup> Structural adjustment policies exemplify the complacent acceptance of neoliberal economic theory to encourage growth. However, these policies ignore the systemic problems that have left many developing countries in a precarious situation. Madeley asserts that the international community is not according enough priority to tackle the problems of food security. He contends that "trade liberalization is the problem not the solution."<sup>40</sup> The dominant social processes and structures within the international

trading system therefore function to maintain the status quo of power relations within the world order. Understood from a constructivist perspective, power policies are socially constructed. Nonetheless, as Wendt pointedly notes, the fact that power politics is socially constructed does not necessitate their elasticity. The pervasiveness is two-fold: first, since actors of a social system are perceived as an objective social fact that fortifies particular behaviours over others. Second, systemic change may be blocked by members that desire to maintain interminable role identities and reduce possible uncertainty.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, new ideas about the relationship between the actors must transcend the path-dependencies created by pervasive arrangements and expectations.

## VI. FOOD SECURITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Social conceptions influence actors in a particular way that is deterministic of the outcomes that they seek obtain.<sup>42</sup> Understanding the connection between ideas and behaviour in this way, illuminates the pervasiveness of the power relationship between the OECD countries and low-income countries. Despite criticisms that the current international trade structure exacerbates vulnerabilities of developing and least developed countries, it has continued to uphold liberalization policies. The WTO Agreement on Agriculture is an example of the ubiquity of norms embodied in trade liberalization. The Agreement on Agriculture has many implications for food security, including in low-income countries of Africa, analysis from a constructivist perspective can therefore provide insights into how the current ideas which dictate the social process of international trade serve to reinforce the status quo. Other measures, including food aid, further demonstrate the failure of the international community to address the systemic and structural problems that lead to food insecurity. The following considers the case of trade liberalization and food security in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the pervasiveness of the ideas of free and open trade, and the need to examine further into how these conceptions influence social process and power relationships within the international trading system. Conversely, a constructivist approach highlights the need to go beyond existing structures which champion neoliberal ideals and perpetuate the current situation.

Many questions have been raised about the possible impact of the Agreement on Agriculture on the food security in the developing countries within Africa. It has been suggested that the agreement would create additional burdens in sub-Saharan Africa as a result of increased volatility of food prices

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 73

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>39</sup> Madeley (2006), 58

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 41

<sup>41</sup> Wendt (1992), 411

<sup>42</sup> Zampetti (2006), 15

and reduction in the levels of food aid.<sup>43</sup> As such the terms of the agreement have reinforced a structure that may lead to repercussions for food security in various regions. According to Samuel Gayi, the consequences of this would depend on the response of agricultural exports of sub-Saharan Africa to the actual level of liberalization attained in international trade.<sup>44</sup> Many developing and least developed countries are highly dependent upon their agricultural sector, and therefore remain highly vulnerable to the social processes dictated by the current structure of the international trading system. Roughly 64 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.<sup>45</sup> Reforms to the agreement which reflect the primacy of the agricultural sector within developing countries can have a widespread impact on both the economic development and the ability of national governments to ensure food security.

## VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The agriculture systems remain weak and archaic due to a lack of resources and investment in the sector which has created an overall low productivity and output. Conversely many countries within the region rely on food imports and aid to cope with the chronic gap between demand and supply for food.<sup>46</sup> Food aid has continued to be resorted as the obvious solution, rather than working outside the current structures. Despite the actions taken by the international community in attempting to rectify these vulnerabilities, the problem of food insecurity remains persistent. In 2003, the FAO concluded that 60 per cent of the total countries are confronted with food shortages were in Africa. These countries continue to rely on international intervention and food aid.<sup>47</sup> The case in sub-Saharan Africa, which may be generalizable to the experience faced by many of the developing and least developed countries, is not temporary, rather the issues of food insecurity is a systemic problem. Neoliberal economic theory continues to dominate and shape the actions taken by the international community in addresses these issues. However, these policies only serve to reinforce the current structure and have thus far failed to provide any sustainable solution to ensure that these countries obtain food security.

The Agreement on Agriculture has also made it difficult for many net-food importing countries to accumulate any of the earnings gained from exports. Many contend that Africa has been negatively

affected by the increase in import expenses as a result of the reductions of preferential arrangements therefore limiting its ability to reap the benefits earned from exports.<sup>48</sup> Kenya for example has experienced a decline in its ability to import as a consequence of the feeble performance of exports. Reports have indicated that rather than accumulating earnings from exports, the country has been using the profits on food import.<sup>49</sup> It is evident therefore the perceived benefits from the Agreement on Agriculture, rather than enhancing the capabilities and the resources of developing countries, have reinforced their precarious situation. The weak performance of sub-Saharan Africa is attributed to the dominant ideas and practices of the international trade. The pervasiveness of neoliberal economic theory has focused efforts of the international community to prescribe policies that have ignored the systemic problems that stifle many low-income countries' attempts to escape the poverty trap. There are many structural constraints that attribute to the weak agricultural performance in sub-Saharan Africa. The lack of technical and administrative capacity, as well as weak infrastructure has further exacerbated the problems faced by these countries, constraining their ability to sustain a robust agricultural industry.

Furthermore, policies pursued by the IMF and the World Bank have restricted the ability of these countries experience to achieve economic gains from trade in agriculture. In particular the restrictions under several IMF and World Bank support programs have constrained the available options of domestic policies for development.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, structural adjustment programs introduced in the 1980s by both the IMF and the World Bank functioned to exacerbate the difficulties created by trade liberalization. The structural adjustment programs required developing countries to structurally adjust their economies in order to be eligible for development aid and assistance.<sup>51</sup> These programs therefore became a central component of the neoliberal trade policies pursued by developing and least developed countries. These policies along with the policies stipulated under the Agreement on Agriculture have had important consequences on the ability of low-income countries to ensure food security within their countries. Notable is the failure of many of agricultural policies emerging from the Agreement on Agriculture which has specifically been pointed to as the dominant factor in the food crisis during 2001-2 which pervaded in southern Africa.<sup>52</sup> These issues are highlighted through a

<sup>43</sup> Gayi (2007), 291

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 291

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 291

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 292

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 299

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 304

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 304

<sup>50</sup> Gayi (2007), 306

<sup>51</sup> Madeley (2006), 44

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 307



constructivist perspective in relation to the prevailing ideas of neoliberal economic ideas and the reluctance of the international community to go beyond the dominant social structures in addressing the fundamental problem of food security in these vulnerable regions. Rather, the repose of the international community has continued to be correlated with the conception of liberalization and greater market access. Initiatives such as food aid function only to reinforce the dependence of low-income countries on the support and assistance of developed countries. Food aid therefore is unable to provide a sustainable solution to the problem of food security. Trade remains a critical part of the strategy of food security; however the norms and practices continue to ignore the systemic problems faced by developing and least developed countries, including the issue of extreme poverty that has given rise to food insecurity. It becomes apparent then, that an appropriate solution must address food security in a holistic manner; one that not only improves the conditions of trade, but also improves access and availability of food, and the development of infrastructure and resources available to these countries. Without addressing the inherent challenges within developing and least developed countries, liberalizing trade will continue only to exacerbate the problem, and increase their vulnerability in assuring the security of the livelihood of their populations.

The Doha Development Round has attempted to address the grievances of the developing and least developed countries attempting to reconcile the widening gap of the distribution of benefits. The recent trade negotiations have attempted to rectify the trading conditions by linking directly the effects development and trade reform. From a constructivist perspective it is imperative to question the ideas that are dominated in the Doha trade round. Wendt asserts that ideas and the distribution of ideas, rather than material forces influence and create social structures. Moreover, ideas establish the meaning and the content of power used by state actors to secure their interests.<sup>53</sup> In assessing whether the Doha Development Round will make a real difference in the distribution of benefits gained from the international trading regime, an integral aspect is determining what ideas are dominating the trade negotiations. The multilateral trade negotiations have placed emphasis in creating a new 'development box' in addition to the three established areas of the Agreement on Agriculture, that address food security, and rural development among other needs of low-income countries. Furthermore, incorporated within the negotiations is a proposal to subject developing and least developed countries to a lower level of liberalization in areas considered 'special products'

that would take into consideration food security.<sup>54</sup> Although the negotiations include proposals that incorporate some of the development concerns, it remains structured around the ideas of trade liberalization without addressing the fundamental obstacles. This problem is highlighted by constructivism which claims that the longer a practice has existed, the more entrenched it will be in the collective consciousness.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the interaction between the state actors embodies the identities and interests that they are trying to sustain.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, change within the system of states does remain possible. When actors redefine their identity and their interests, structural change becomes a real possibility. Wendt remarks that structural change is only problematic when change is in the interest pursued by actors aimed at the welfare of the group. Collective identity formation is therefore a central requisite to allow for structural reform.<sup>57</sup> The shift in focus within the Doha Development Round resembles the beginnings of structural change within the international trade system. The efforts however remain constrained by ideas of neoliberal economic theory and food insecurity is still a real issue for many low-income countries. The effect of the expansion of the global trading regime has continued to threaten the livelihood of the inhabitants of many developing countries of the global south, despite the efforts of the recent trade negotiations. Transformation of identity and interest, from the constructivist perspective suggests that process of the "evolution of cooperation" is cumulative and slow.<sup>58</sup> The Doha Development trade negotiations have demonstrated efforts towards establishing a more cooperative and fair regime, that is sensitive to the vulnerabilities of developing countries. Yet, the disparities which continue to plague the global trading system will continue to suppress low-income countries under the poverty trap, unless the relationship of the prevailing ideas of trade and its effect in maintaining the status quo are critically questioned.

<sup>53</sup> Wendt (1999), 309

<sup>54</sup> Gayi (2007), 315

<sup>55</sup> Wendt (1999), 310

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 316

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 336

<sup>58</sup> Wendt (1992), 418

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

International Trade Relations. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar)

- [1] Alexandratos, Nikos ed. (1995). World Agriculture: Towards 2010 An FAO Study. (West Sussex: The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).
- [2] Cline, William R. (2004) Trade Policy and Global Poverty. (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics: Centre for Global Development)
- [3] Gayi, Samuel K. (2007). Does the WTO Agreement on Agriculture Endanger Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa? In Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, Shabd S. Acharya and Benjamin Davis, ed. *Food Security: Indicators, Measurement, and the Impact of Trade Openness,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- [4] Guzzini, Stefano. (2005). The Concept of Power: a Constructivist Analysis. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 495-521
- [5] Haggard, Stephan and Simmons, Beth. Theories of International Regimes. *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer, 1987) pp. 491-517
- [6] Hoda, Anwarul and Gulati, Ashok. (2007). WTO Negotiations on Agriculture and Developing Countries. (Washington, D.C: The Johns Hopkins University Press)
- [7] Keohane, Robert. The Demand for International Regimes. *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring, 1982), pp. 325-355
- [8] Madeley, John. (2006). Hungry for Trade: How the Poor Pay for Free Trade. (Halifax: Fenwood)
- [9] Nagel, Thomas (2005). The Problem of Global Justice. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp 113- 148
- [10] Oyejide, Ademola.(2004). Development Dimensions in Multilateral Trade Negotiations. In Mike Moore, ed. *Doha and Beyond: The Future of the Multilateral Trading System,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- [11] Sampson, Gary P (2005). The WTO and Sustainable Development. (Hong Kong: UN University Press)
- [12] Smith, James (2004). Inequality in International Trade? Developing Countries and Institutional Change in WTO Dispute Settlement. *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp 542-573
- [13] Wendt, Alexandre.(1999) Social Theory of International Politics. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- [14] Wendt, Alexandre. Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics. *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 391-425
- [15] Zampetti, Americo Beviqua. (2006). Fairness in the World Economy: US Perspectives on